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ABSTRACT

The Durham Public Schools Communities in Schools (CIS) Academy provides a student-centered environment that encourages high-risk students to remain in school and get back on track for graduation. Program operations began in January 1995. This paper presents the results of an evaluation of the first semester of operations (the second semester of the 1994-95 school year). Thirty-nine students spent the first semester of the 1994-95 school year at their "sending" school and the second semester of that school year at CIS Academy. The Academy met the following three objectives (out of a total of seven): (1) 90 percent of the students would stay in school; (2) 60 percent of the students would improve their grades; and (3) students would increase their attendance by 5 days. The program fell short of meeting its goals for promoting 80 percent of students to the next grade, linking 80 percent of families with community resources, linking 80 percent of students with a tutor or mentor, and procuring the participation of 75 percent of families in two training conferences or home visits. The incidence of student tardiness increased and the number of suspensions decreased. CIS also had little effect on enabling students to pass the North Carolina high school graduation requirements. It is recommended that CIS work more on preparing students and their home schools for their return to regular education and to provide students with followup support. Fourteen figures and five endnotes are included. (LMI)

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ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS PERFORMING BELOW POTENTIAL: EVALUATION OF ONE LEA'S ATTEMPT TO PROVIDE A SOLUTION

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Executive Summary

The Durham Public Schools Communities in Schools (CIS) Academy provides a student-centered environment that encourages students performing below potential and at risk of dropping out of school to remain in school and get back on track for graduation. It began program operations in January 1995 with 45 students receiving services by the end of the first month of operations. Altogether, 63 students were enrolled during some part of the first semester at the CIS Academy. This evaluation of the CIS Academy focuses on only the first semester of operations (i.e., the second semester of the 1994-95 school year). Since a large percentage of students were in their sending school during the first semester and at the CIS Academy during most of the second semester, this allowed for a naturally occurring experiment. Changes could be evaluated in students between outcomes obtained at their sending school (i.e., during the first semester) and those obtained while at the CIS Academy (i.e., those obtained during the second semester). There were 39 students (hereafter referred to a full-semester students) who "split" their time under these two conditions.

The CIS Academy had eight program objectives, but data were available for analysis for only seven of these objectives. These objectives were originally stated as year-long objectives, but since the program did not start until midyear, they were judged against only a half-year of program operation. Data also were analyzed for three other variables. The results on each of these ten sets of variables are summarized below.

The first objective was that 90 percent of the students would stay in school. Although some of these students had previously dropped out and re-entered and others were on a course towards becoming a dropout due to poor performance and/or lack of attendance, 91.1 percent of these full-semester CIS Academy students stayed in school to the end of the semester and entered school the following school year.

The second objective was that 80 percent of the students would be promoted to the next grade. In fact, only 53.8 percent of the full-semester students were promoted. However, most of these students were not promoted primarily due to their performance during the first semester, not their performance while at the CIS Academy.

The third objective that was evaluated was to link 80 percent of the families of CIS Academy students with community resources. Within the one semester, 51.3 percent of the families of the full-semester students were linked to a community resource. A related objective was that 75 percent of the families would participate in two training conferences or home visits. Only one training conference was held during the first semester of operation. However, 46.2 percent of the families of full-semester students were visited at home and, with the one training conference, 35.9 percent of the families received either two or more home visits or received one home visit and participated in the training session.

A fifth objective was that 80 percent of the CIS Academy students would be linked with a tutor or mentor. During the course of this single semester, one-third of the full-semester students were linked with a tutor or mentor. A sixth objective was that 60 percent of the students would improve their grades

in two or more subjects. In fact, almost 90 percent of the students met this objective and there were statistically significant increases in grade point averages, number and percent of credits earned, and percentage of courses passed.

A seventh objective was that CIS Academy students would increase their attendance by five days. Although this objective was exceeded (the average number of overall absences dropped significantly from 18.4 to 12.4), the number of unexcused absences rose significantly.

Thus, of these seven objectives, three were achieved and considerable progress was made on most of the others within this limited one-semester time frame. In addition to these objectives, the evaluator also examined the number of tardies and discipline problems by students and passage of the state's high school graduation competency test. Tardies, both excused and unexcused, increased by statistically significant margins—especially unexcused tardies, which increased sixteenfold. However, overall student suspensions as well as in-school and out-of-school suspensions decreased by statistically significant margins for these full-semester students while in the CIS Academy.

Most of the full-semester students had passed the competency test prior to program entry. Only about 40 percent of those students who had not passed this requirement prior to program entry (which is an eighth grade performance requirement) were able to pass it during up to three opportunities following one semester or more at the CIS Academy.

The report discusses several important study and program considerations, including regression to the mean effects, staffing implications, an examination of whether grade inflation was occurring at the CIS Academy (it does not appear to be so), and time lost to instruction through absences and tardiness. The report concludes with several overall recommendations concerning the study findings.

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Acknowledgments

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For the contributions of all of these people as well as others unnamed here, I am truly thankful.

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March 1996

Alternative Education for At-Risk Students Performing Below Potential: Evaluation of One LEA's Attempt to Provide a Solution

The Communities In Schools (CIS) Academy, operated through the Durham Public Schools, provides a student-centered environment that encourages students performing below potential and at risk of dropping out of school to remain in school and get back on track for graduation.

Nationally, CIS has had success in reaching students through the CIS Academy model school, which is typically a freestanding facility or wing of an existing school, sponsored largely by an individual corporation or organization. The CIS Academy represents a total partnership between the local school system, the sponsoring partner, local social service and health agencies, and the local and national CIS programs. All of these partners are involved in the academy.

In Durham, the CIS Academy is situated within the old Hope Valley Elementary School located at 3023 University Drive in Durham. The vision of the Academy is that its students will become productive members of society through their experience in this environment of mutual respect, trust, shared decision making, and goal setting.

Mission and Goals

The mission of the CIS Academy is to support the work of the Durham Public Schools by helping to keep at-risk students in school through graduation, and by formulating public and private partnerships that facilitate and support delivery of educational, social, and community health and human service programs and make available to individual students the resources and interventions needed to eliminate drop-out risk factors. The Academy is not designed for students with serious behavioral problems nor to serve Exceptional Children.

There are three primary goals of a CIS Academy as specified in CIS literature. These goals are specified below:

1. Promote students' personal growth by encouraging and helping them to:

    - Increase their ability to make responsible decisions in matters affecting their mental, physical, and emotional development;
    - Gain greater understanding of, and control over, their interpersonal relationships and their environment;
    - Develop a positive self-concept ;
    - Develop a positive attitude toward learning;
    - Learn to work independently;
    - Assume responsibilities; and
    - Develop a positive attitude toward society.

2. Enhance students' basic knowledge and skills by encouraging and helping them to:

   - Master the basic skills of arithmetic, geometry, and communications (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) and the ability to demonstrate these skills in everyday problem-solving;
   - Develop appreciation for aesthetic values and grow in creative interests and abilities; and
   - Apply acquired learning to everyday life.

3. Help boost students' employment skills and experience by:

   - Encouraging and helping them to develop skills in assessing themselves and identifying career opportunities;
   - Write resumes, complete job application forms, and search and interview for jobs; and
   - Manage their personal responsibilities to become dependable, reliable employees.

However, it should be noted that most of theses goals and objectives for a CIS Academy are specified as full-year goals while, during its initial school year of operation, the DPS CIS Academy did not open until the beginning of the second semester of the 1994-95 school year. In addition, most of the goals of the DPS CIS Academy cannot be evaluated within the context of this report because 1). there was no evaluation plan included with the proposal for the CIS Academy, 2). the present evaluation was begun after the completion of the first semester of operation of the CIS Academy, and 3). the staff of the CIS Academy did not collect any baseline information directly related to these specified goals.

CIS Academy Program of Studies

The following courses were offered at the CIS Academy during its first semester of operation:

English I, II, III
Physical Science, Biology
World History, U.S. History, Civics
Algebra I and II, Geometry, Introduction to High School Mathematics
Health, Physical Education, First Aid, Combination Sports
Keyboarding, Computer Applications I
Physical Science, Biology
Workplace Readiness, Teen Living, and Academic Study Skills

Staffing

The Communities in Schools Academy staff was comprised of the following personnel:

1 Administrator
1 Administrative Assistant/SIMS Coordinator
5 Teachers (English, math, social studies, science, and healthful living)
1 Counselor
1 Family Specialist
1 Custodian

1 Nurse
3 Vista Volunteers

Student Selection Procedures

Eligible students were 9th and 10th grade students who exhibit potential dropout behaviors, such as:

- Repeating at least one grade;
- Having excessive absences;
- Failing at least two classes;
- Having documented emotional or family problems that interfere with school success;
- Expressing the intent to drop out, or having previously dropped out;
- Involvement with the court system; and/or
- Displaying negative feelings about self or school.

The members of the Student Selection Committee were the CIS Project Director, CIS Family Specialist, and CIS Guidance Counselor. Other members included representatives from the referring school (i.e., guidance counselor, social worker, assistant principal, or principal's designee).

Durham students who met the program requirements above and had an interest in the CIS Academy could be referred by their principal, a teacher, a social worker, a counselor, or a parent. All referring schools were required to complete the Student Referral for Alternative Program and Referral for CIS Academy forms. In addition, sending teachers were asked to complete the CIS Academy Checklist of Observations. Once the CIS Academy received all documentation, parents and referring schools were notified of an interview. Within three days after the interview, parents were notified of acceptance or denial either by telephone or letter.

If the referring school representative could not attend the scheduled interview, the CIS Academy contacted all parties involved with the student (e.g., guidance counselor, therapist, social worker, other schools the student may have attended if the student was new to Durham Public Schools). Additional information was normally required to aid in the review process.

If the student was accepted, the parent(s) was (were) notified to withdraw the student from the referring school. The DPS Transportation Department was notified to develop busing arrangements and scheduling was completed. The appropriate cumulative files were requested by the CIS Academy.

Program Structure and Organization

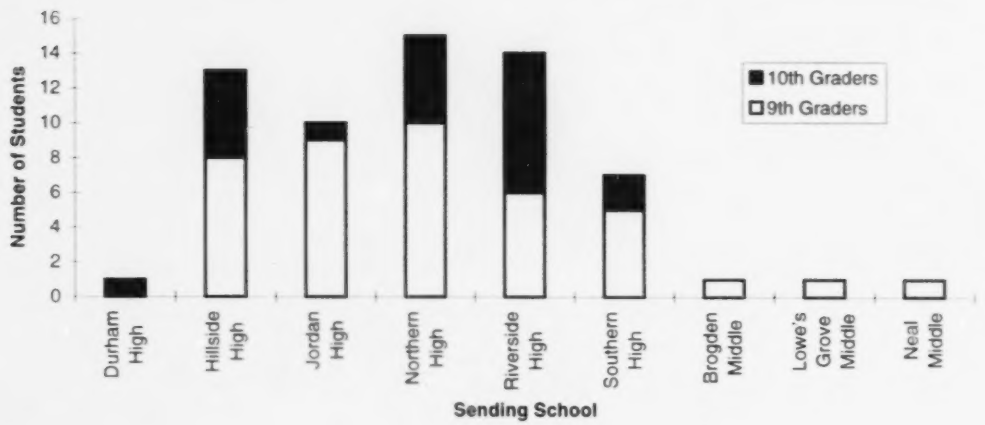
The program was designed to house 60 local high school age students from grades 9 and 10 who had demonstrated academic competency, but who had not been academically or behaviorally successful in a traditional high school setting. Priority for placement was given to students who were age appropriate. The desired class size was about 15 students. Transportation was provided for all students who wanted bus transportation. Students cannot graduate from high school while in the CIS Academy. Rather, students must return to a regular high school before their year of graduation.

Program operations began on January 3rd, 1995, with 16 students. By February 2nd there were 45 students. During the course of the second semester, a total of 63 students (35 females and 28 males) attended the Academy. There were 34 African American students (54.0 percent), 28 white students (44.4 percent), and 1 Native American. The sending schools and grade levels for these students are indicated below:

Sending School	9th Graders	10th Graders	Total
Durham High	0	1	1
Hillside High	8	5	13
Jordan High	9	1	10
Northern High	10	5	15
Riverside High	6	8	14
Southern High	5	2	7
Brogden Middle	1	0	1
Lowe's Grove Middle	1	0	1
Neal Middle	1	0	1
Total	41	22	63

This distribution of students by sending school and grade level is presented graphically below.

Distribution of CIS Academy Students by Grade Level and Sending School



It should be noted that the three students received from middle schools were special-case students. Each of these students was overage for current grade level placement and both the middle school principal and guidance counselor determined that these students could function at the 9th grade level if they were accepted by the CIS Academy.

Program Objectives

The annual desired program outcomes and results for the beginning year of program operations included:

- 90 percent of CIS Academy students will remain in school;
- 80 percent of CIS Academy students will be promoted to the next grade;
- 60 percent of CIS Academy students will meet their individual goals;
- 80 percent of CIS Academy families will be linked with a community resource;
- 75 percent of CIS Academy parents will participate in two training conferences or home visits; and
- 80 percent of CIS Academy students will be linked with a tutor/mentor.

The remainder of this report will review the findings from the data available to the evaluator relevant to each of these objectives.

Evaluation of Program Outcomes

There were 63 students who enrolled in the CIS Academy during its first semester of operation--the spring semester of the 1995-96 school year. Of these 63 students, 45 students (71.4 percent) were present by February 2nd (i.e., within one month of program startup). All but six of these initial students remained in the program for the rest of the school year. These 39 full-semester completers comprise the primary study group for most of the subsequent analyses and allow for the evaluation of a naturally occurring experiment. These full-semester completers spent most or all of the first semester of the 1995-96 school year at their home (sending) school, and then went on to spend most or all of the second semester at the CIS Academy. Thus, comparison of student information between the two semesters provides an estimate of the effects of the CIS Academy for these 39 students. Where data are presented graphically in this report, they are presented only for these 39 full-semester students.

Where data were collected by the staff of the CIS Academy or were available through student transcripts, SIMS, and file data, they are summarized below by program objective.

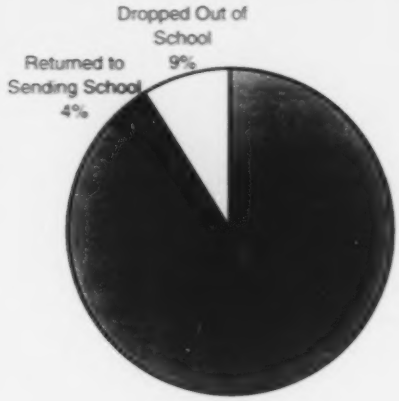
Objective 1: 90 percent of CIS Academy students will remain in school

Of the 63 students enrolled in the CIS Academy at some point during the spring 1995 semester, all but six students remained in the program for the rest of the school year. Of the original group of students, 39 of 45 (86.7 percent) remained in the CIS Academy for the full semester.

Of the 6 students who did not remain in the program, four dropped out of school (two of whom intended to transfer to other school districts, but did not). The other two students returned to their sending school. Thus, 41 of the 45 students (91.1 percent) remained in school meeting the goal of a 90 percent retention rate, even though these students were at the CIS Academy for only one semester. This goal was later increased to a 98 percent retention rate.[1] Although the revised goal of 98 percent was not met, the original goal of 90 percent was achieved.

Disposition of the 45 students who entered the CIS Academy at the beginning of the second semester is shown below.

Status of CIS Academy Students After 1 Semester

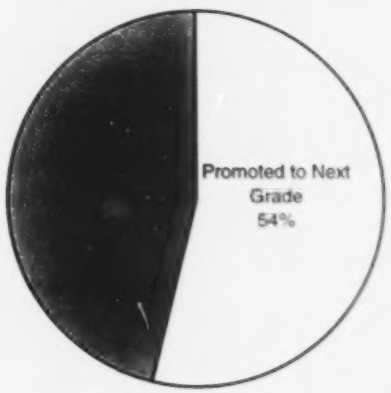


All 18 of the students who entered later than one month into the program remained to the end of the semester. Of these late entrants, 5 entered in February, 8 entered in March, and 5 entered in April.

Objective 2: 80 percent of CIS Academy students will be promoted to the next grade

Of the 63 CIS Academy students, 30 (47.6 percent) were promoted to the next grade, with promotion information not available for two students. Of the 39 full-semester students, 21 (53.8 percent) were promoted to the next grade.[2] Thus, this goal was not met. However, the CIS Academy only had these students for one semester, and the goal was originally based on a full-year program.

Percent of CIS Academy Students Promoted



Objective 3: 60 percent of CIS Academy students will meet their individual goals

No individual goals were established for students. Thus, this objective could not be evaluated.

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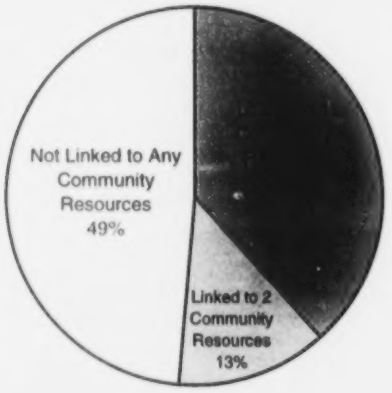
Objective 4: 80 percent of CIS Academy families will be linked with a community resource

For all 63 students, 27 (42.9 percent) of their families were linked with one or more community resource. Eight of these families were linked with two community resources.

For the families of full-semester students, a much higher percentage was reached. Fifteen (38.5 percent) of these families were linked with one community resource and five families (12.8 percent) were linked with two community resources. These resources included psychiatrists and psychologists, child advocacy, family counseling, the court system, and the Community Guidance Clinic. Although this goal was not reached, it had been originally stated as a year-long goal, but only one semester of data was available.

Percent of Families Linked to Community Resources



Objective 5: 75 percent of CIS Academy parents will participate in two training conferences or home visits

A total of 49 home visits were made to the parents of 24 different CIS Academy students. Thirty-two of these visits were made to the homes of 18 different full-semester students. Thus, 39.7 percent of all parent homes were visited and 46.2 percent of the homes of full-semester students were visited.

Only one training conference was provided for parents. This was a set of Saturday workshops on the topics of teen depression, teen sexuality, gangs, and alcohol and other drugs. A total of 21 parents, or sets of parents, attended this conference, with 16 of these parents representing full-semester students (a 41.0 percent representation). These parents represented 13 additional families who were not visited at home, of which 10 of these were from families of full-semester students. Thus, 37 families (58.7 percent of all of the CIS families) participated in either a training conference and/or home visit and 28 families (71.8 percent) of full-semester students participated in either a training conference and/or home visit. However, only 14 families of full-semester students (35.9 percent)

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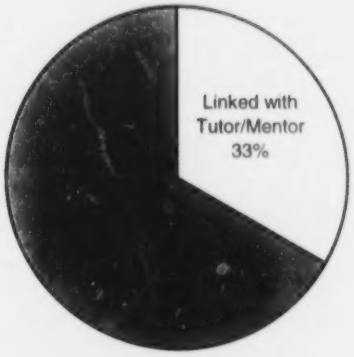
participated in two training conferences or visits. Thus, this goal was not achieved within the confines of a single semester.

Percent of Families Participating in Training Conferences or Home Visits

Objective 6: 80 percent of CIS Academy students will be linked with a tutor/mentor

Thirteen students (all full-semester students, accounting for one-third of these study students) were linked with a tutor or mentor during the semester. Thus, this goal was not achieved within a single semester.[3]

Percent of CIS Academy Students Linked with a Tutor/Mentor



Thus, during the first semester of program operations, the CIS Academy was able to meet only 1 of these 6 objectives. However, this may be attributed largely to the fact that the CIS Academy operated for only

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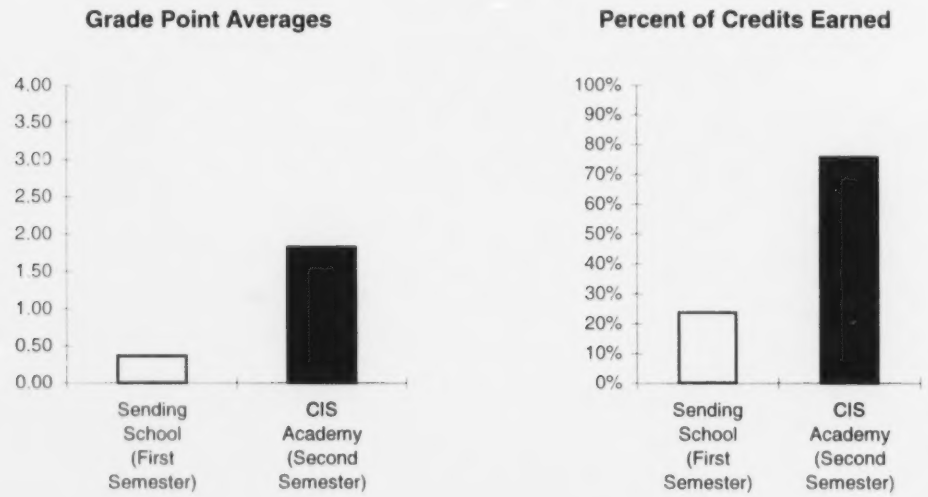
a semester, not a full school year. Most importantly, the goal that was met was the one of keeping these students in school. Unless these students are kept in school, none of the other objectives can be accomplished.

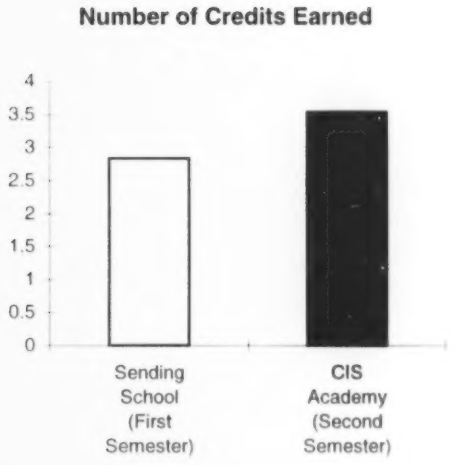
In addition to these 6 explicitly stated program objectives, there were two other program outcomes that were presented in the document "June 1995 Year End Report." These outcomes (stated as objectives) are:

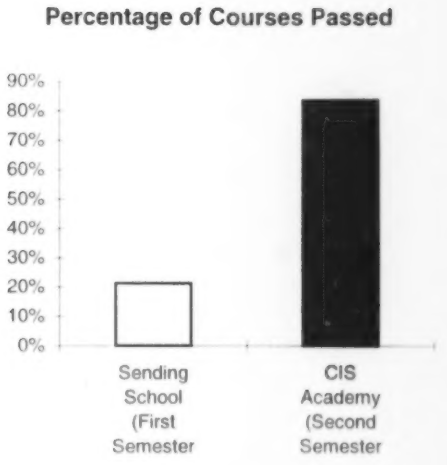
Objective 7: 60 percent of CIS students will improve their grades in two or more subjects

CIS Academy students demonstrated a considerable improvement in their subject matter grades from the first semester to the second semester of the 1994-95 school year. For the full-semester students, the average semester GPA increased from 0.36 to 1.81—better than a five-fold increase and statistically significantly ($t=-12.34$, $df=38$, $p<.001$). However, this is still a C- average. The percentage of credits earned (out of credits taken) for each semester also increased by a statistically significant amount from 23.6 percent to 75.6 percent ($t=-12.95$, $df=38$, $p<.001$).



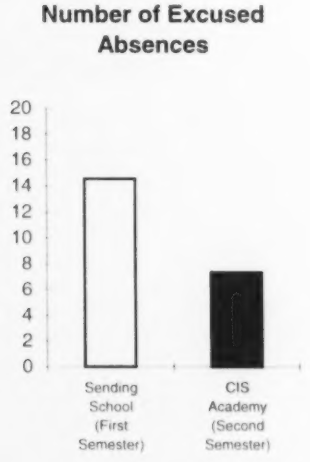
For full-semester students, 35 of 39 (89.7 percent) increased the number of subjects passed in the semester by two or more courses. In fact, 8 of these students went from passing no subjects in the first semester to passing all seven subjects they took in the second semester. As further measures, the average number of credits earned (i.e., credit for courses passed) increased by a statistically significant amount from 2.83 credits to 3.53 credits ($t=-7.93$, $df=38$, $p<.001$) and the percentage of courses passed each semester also increased by a statistically significant amount from an average of 21.2 percent to 83.6 percent (-12.95, $df=38$, $p<.001$). Of these full-semester students, 12.8 percent obtained a "B" average, 51.3 percent obtained a "C" average, and 17.9 percent obtained a "D" average, and 17.9 percent received a failing ("F") average for the semester. Thus, this objective was met, although more failures occurred than grades of "A" and "B".

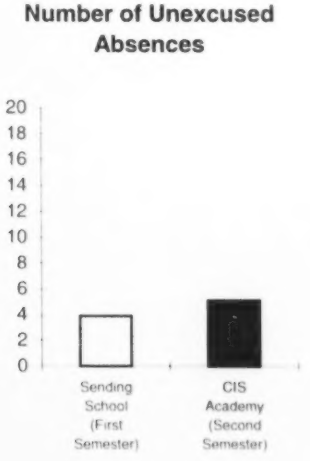


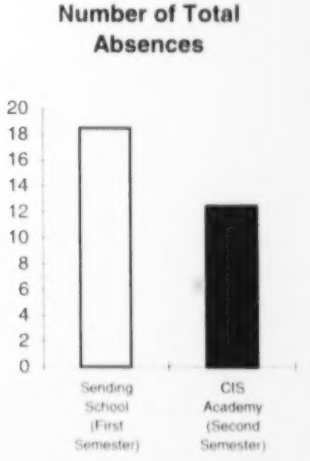


Objective 8: 51 percent of CIS Academy students will increase their attendance by five days

Twenty of the 39 full-semester students (51.3 percent) decreased their number of absences by 5 days or more while attending the CIS Academy. The average number of overall absences per semester for full-semester students decreased by a statistically significant amount from 18.4 days to 12.4 days—a average decrease of six days ($t=3.76$, $df=38$, $p<.001$). However, this decrease was due to a statistically significant decrease in the average number of excused absences from 14.6 days down to 7.3 days ($t=4.25$, $df=38$, $p<.001$), while there was a significant increase in the average number of unexcused absences from 3.9 days to 5.1 days ($t=-7.66$, $df=38$, $p<.001$). Thus, although the overall objective was met, there was a significant increase in unexcused absences for students attending the CIS Academy.



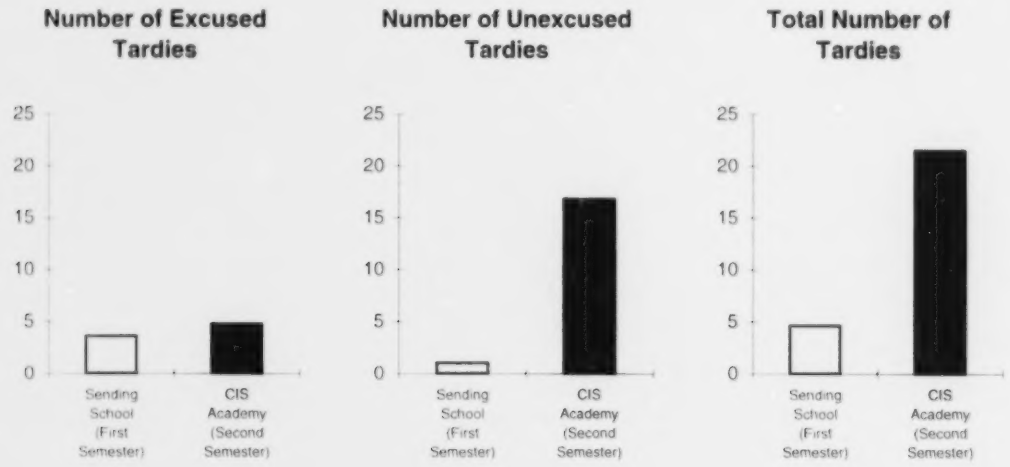




In addition to these stated program objectives, there are at least three additional measures on which data are available to compare the performance of these students over time.

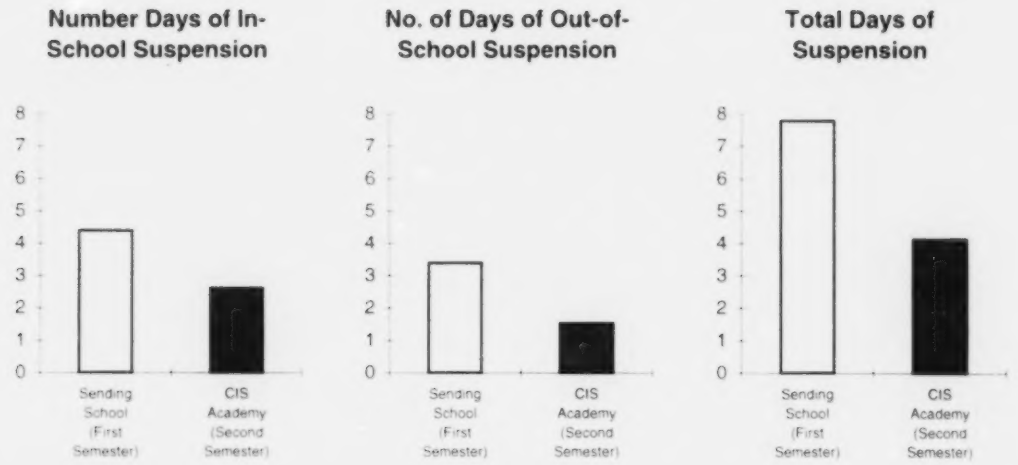
Tardies

The number of tardies for full-semester students at the CIS Academy increased by a statistically significant amount while these students were in the Academy. The average first semester number of tardies was 4.6 while at their sending schools, which increased to an average of 21.5 tardies at the CIS Academy ($t=-7.46$, $df=38$, $p<.001$). While the number of excused tardies increased by one-third (from 3.6 days tardy to 4.7 days tardy; $t=4.25$, $df=38$, $p<.001$), the number of unexcused tardies increased over 16 fold (from 1.0 day to 16.8 days; $t=-7.66$, $df=38$, $p<.001$). Thus, there appears to be a serious problem with unexcused tardiness within the CIS Academy.



Disciplinary Problems

The total number of disciplinary problems decreased by a statistically significant amount for full-semester students at the CIS Academy. There was an average of 7.8 days of suspension for these students before entering the Academy, which dropped to 4.1 days while in the Academy ($t=3.07$, $df=38$, $p<.004$). Much of this decline came in the area of a reduction in in-school suspensions (from 4.4 to 2.6).[4] However, even the number of out-of-school suspensions decreased significantly (from 3.4 days to 1.5 days; $t=2.43$, $df=38$, $p<.02$). Therefore, it appears that the CIS Academy is having a positive impact on the behaviors of its students.

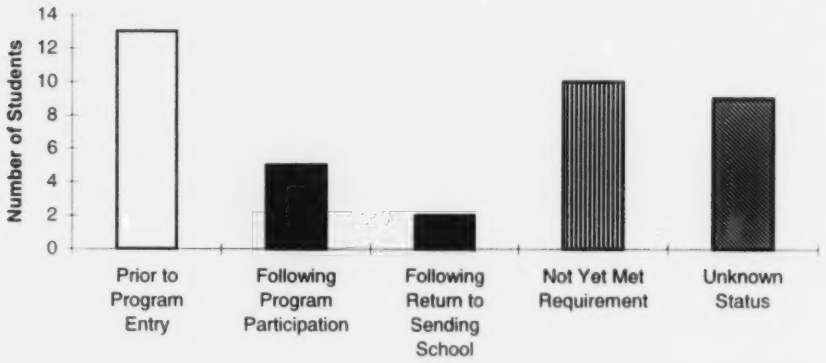


Passage of the Eighth Grade Competency Test

Of the 63 students who entered the CIS Academy during the 1994-95 as either 9th or 10th graders, data are unavailable for 11 students as to whether or not they have passed the competency test requirement for graduation.[5] Of the remaining 52 students, 23 students (44.2 percent) had passed the competency test requirements prior to entering the CIS Academy. Of those 29 students who entered the CIS Academy without prior passage of the competency test, 4 students (13.8 percent) were able to pass the exam following one semester at the Academy and one additional CIS Academy student passed following that year's summer school. One additional CIS Academy student passed the exam following the first semester of 1995-96 at the CIS Academy and four additional students (another 13.8 percent) also passed the exam following the first semester after returning to their home school for the semester. Eighteen of the CIS Academy students (34.6 percent) have not yet passed the North Carolina competency examination requirement for graduation as of March 1996.

For the 39 full-semester students only, the status of passage of the North Carolina competency test requirement for graduation is unknown for 9 students. Of the other 30 students for which graduation status is known, 13 (43.3 percent) had passed the graduation competency test requirement prior to their entry into the CIS Academy. Four students (13.3 percent) passed this requirement after the spring semester at the CIS Academy and another passed it following summer school. Two additional students passed the requirement after returning to their sending school for a semester. However, 10 (33.3 percent) of these full-semester CIS Academy student have not yet met the high school graduation requirement.

Passage of NC HS Graduation Competency Test Requirement by 1994-95 CIS Academy Students



Thus, one or two semesters at the CIS Academy has had little effect on enabling students to pass the North Carolina high school graduation requirements.

Other Program Findings

There are special staffing needs within a setting such as the CIS Academy due to the special needs of the population being served. However, the social studies teacher for the first semester of operation (the second semester of the 1994-95 school year) was a science teacher teaching out of field. This social studies teacher has a masters degree and 20 years of experience, but less than 3 years of teaching at the high school level. The 1994-95 math teacher had only one year of prior experience and stayed only through the first semester of 1995-96. He was replaced by a math teacher with no experience. The English teacher during the second semester of 1994-95 was in his first year of teaching; he was replaced in 1995-96 by a teacher who has had eight years of classroom experience, but had not been in the classroom for 10 years and resigned following the first semester of the 1995-96 school year, being unable to work with the student population of the CIS Academy. She was replaced by an English teacher with 12 years of experience. The science teacher, with 20 years of experience, and the healthful living teacher, with no prior experience, continued this year at the CIS Academy.

Discussion

The researchers investigated whether the increases in GPA scores might be attributable to grade inflation at the CIS Academy. The benchmark was the student's score on the 8th grade North Carolina End-of-Grade (EOG) Test. Using this benchmark, second semester GPAs were more highly correlated with 8th grade EOG Test percentile scores in reading than were first semester GPAs ($r=.204$, $df=18$, and $p<.387$ for first semester versus $r=.093$, $df=18$, and $p<.698$ for second semester), although neither of these relationships approached significance. Mathematics EOG results were in the opposite direction ($r=.206$, $df=18$, and $p<.384$ for first semester versus $r=.320$, $df=18$, and $p<.169$ for second semester), although again neither relationship approached significance. While the correlations for second semester GPAs

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stayed consistent in both reading and math, they were quite divergent for first semester GPAs with math being much higher than reading. Thus, there does not appear to be a detectable grade inflation bias at the CIS Academy.

A major concern is the number of days and minutes lost to instruction. Although absences decreased for CIS Academy students after leaving their home school, the average number of absences was still unreasonably high and the number of unexcused absences actually increased. In addition, tardiness actually increased for CIS Academy students. While excused tardies remained about the same, unexcused tardies increased sixteenfold. With an average of being absent 13.8 percent of the time and tardy another 23.9 percent of the time (at least in some classes), these students are missing an extraordinary amount of instructional time. This is a problem which the CIS Academy, in particular, and Durham Public Schools, in general, must address to increase the amount of student learning. Learning simply cannot take place when students are not receiving instruction.

Some of the most talented and capable personnel in the school system should be located at this facility. But this has not been the case. Part of this problem was due to the late start of the program last year after all of the "good" staff had been placed. However, turnover remains high and level of staff training and experience is quite low for a specialized school of this type. Although program outcomes in general are promising, the lack of experienced, qualified personnel and the teacher turnover could be limiting even more demonstrable program effects.

An associated personnel problem is caused by the small overall number of staff, leaving little room for shifting personnel or filling in gaps as needs arise. For example, the Family Specialist is now on family leave, and no one is available to substitute for this vital role. In addition, the custodian has missed quite a few days due to family health problems, and students have had to be enlisted to help clean and maintain the building.

Finally, some of the positive results obtained by this program must be interpreted with caution. Many of the students selected had extremely high numbers of absences and tardies and/or low grade point averages prior to program entry. When such extreme populations are selected, statistics indicate that these extremes generally moderate over time. Therefore, one could expect some of this "regression to the mean" effect when following up with this sample of students. However, the magnitude of the gains, especially in terms of credits passed, are remarkable and beyond anything that could be reasonably attributed solely to a regression effect.

Conclusions

Although no systematic data were collected, many CIS Academy students have expressed the warm, caring nature of the Academy and its program as a reason for staying in school. These students felt lost in our large, highly impersonalized middle and high schools. Many of them were simply "falling through the cracks" of our educational system. Thus, the CIS Academy is directly responsible for keeping many of these students in school.

However, several of the students who returned to their sending school after one semester in the CIS Academy were unable to cope in their home school environment and, subsequently, dropped out. While the CIS Academy should not be a cocoon for these students, the CIS Academy must take responsibility for preparing these students for re-entry into their home school. The role of the counselor is extremely

important in this process, not only as the counselor prepares the student for the transition, but also as s/he prepares the receiving school for this student's return. An exit interview and follow-up interviews with the student are necessary to ensure that this transition back to the regular high school is successful. Since the CIS counselor has a relatively light load of students compared to other high school counselors, this responsibility should not be an unreasonable burden on the counselor.

Finally, one could argue that the cost of the CIS Academy is not worth the effort. It cost about $8,750 per student to operate the CIS Academy during its first semester. However, many of these students already had encountered serious personal and social problems, and several of them already had had interactions with the courts system. The cost of the CIS Academy has to be balanced with the costs to society if these students drop out of school—both in terms of lost wage earning potential as well as the costs of incarceration. Unfortunately, this society rarely examines these opportunity costs, favoring punishment costs over the costs of prevention.

Endnotes

1. **June 1995 Year End Report: Objectives vs. Results**.

2. CIS Academy staff reported in the **CIS Program Report, Jan thru June 1995** that 15 students (25 percent) were promoted without summer school and 25 students (41.7 percent) were promoted with summer school. However, these figures appear to be in error based on the follow-up of these students.

3. The **CIS Program Report, Jan thru June 1995** reported that 10 students (5 9th graders and 5 10th graders, or 15.9 percent) were tutored while in the CIS Academy, but subsequent analysis located three additional students.

4. The CIS Academy did not have an in-school suspension program due to a lack of personnel to supervise such a program. However, offenses that would have merited in-school suspension were recorded and students had to serve afterschool detention for these offenses. Days of detention awarded for in-school suspension behaviors were recorded as in-school suspension days for the purposes of this evaluation.

5. This is due to having left school, the school district, or having dropped out. Probably, the overwhelming majority of these 11 students have <u>not</u> met the competency examination requirements for North Carolina.